



Klamath Network Featured Creature

June 2009

Western Toad (*Bufo boreas*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The western toad (*Bufo boreas*) is one of two *Bufo* toad species found in the Pacific Northwest and the only true toad species found in the Klamath region. Males are up to 4 ¼" and females are up to 5" long. Along this entire length, a light yellow, white, or green stripe runs down the toad's back, which can be between reddish-brown to gray to olive green. The belly is yellow or cream with dark patches and both sexes have pale throats. Warts on their dry, bumpy skin are tinged with red and surrounded by black blotches, especially in younger toads. Males are less blotchy and tend to have smoother skin. They also lack pronounced vocal sacs. Two horny tubercles on the hind feet, distinct oval paratoid glands behind the eyes, and horizontal pupils are all also identification characteristics. Their skin secretions are unpalatable to predators.

Behavior:

Western toads are most active in the twilight hours. In higher elevations, where temperatures are cooler, their activity extends into the day as well. Also in these cooler areas, they may hibernate during the cold months. Like other toads, they walk rather than hop. You might see them foraging for invertebrates during the daylight hours on overcast or rainy days. They dig out burrows (using their horny tubercles) to dwell in, or commandeer abandoned ones of small rodents.

Habitat and Distribution:

Bufo boreas has a large distribution, from the Pacific Coast of southern Alaska through Baja California and east into Alberta, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Nevada. The Klamath region is firmly in western toad territory. The western toad is most common around small lakes and marshes and also occurs in meadows and woodlands.



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Photo taken by Bruce Bury at Whiskeytown during the Klamath Network's reptile and amphibian inventory.

Reproduction:

Bufo boreas are sexually mature at 4-6 years old. The window of time in which they breed is very wide, depending on the climate and location. Breeding begins in January in the coastal areas and extends to July in the high montane areas. Several hundred males may gather in a water body to try their luck. Females lay egg strings of ~12,000 eggs in shallow, still water and attached to vegetation. After 3-10 days, the eggs hatch and very dark tadpoles appear. These tadpoles eat algae, detritus, and sometimes even carrion in the month and a half it takes them to mature and metamorphose into toads.

Interesting Fact:

Western toads do not give mating calls or vocalizations. The chirps (like chicks) that they make are in response to other toads and predators touching them. Whether these are made defensively or aggressively is still up to debate.

Where to see in the Network:

The western toad is common and widespread throughout our area. However, it is becoming increasingly less common and is on the IUCN Red List as "Near Threatened." Loss of wetland habitat and deaths by cars are two causes for declines in populations.

More Information:

[California Herps Web Site](#)

[Click here to listen to its chirp](#)

Nussbaum, R. A., E. D. Brodie Jr., and R. M. Storm. 1983. Amphibians & reptiles of the Pacific Northwest. University of Idaho Press, Moscow, Idaho.